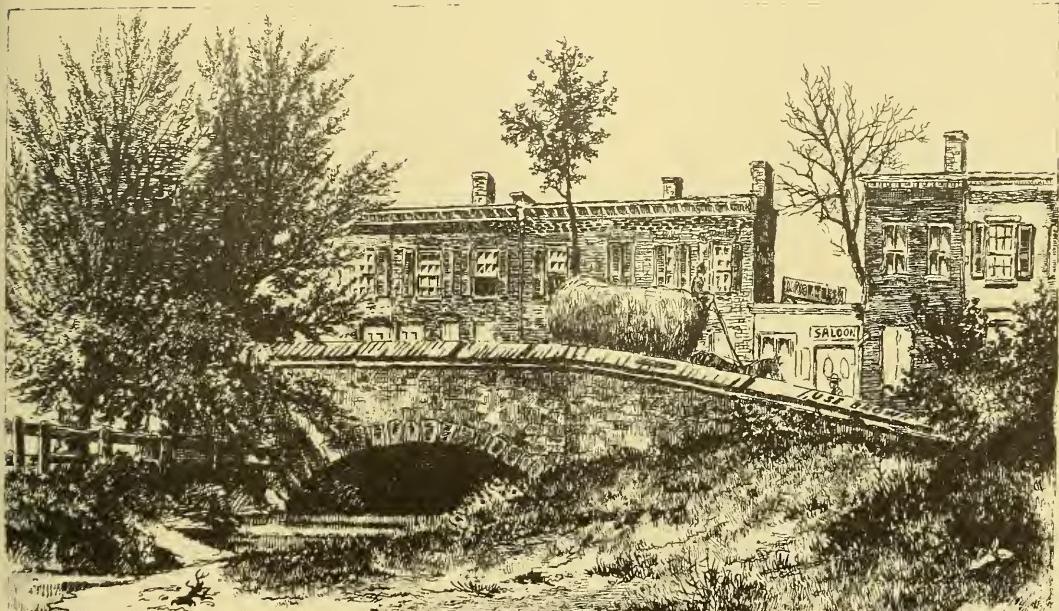


SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS
AUTUMN 1976
VOL. XXVI NO. 4

Four Quarters



THE OLD STONE BRIDGE AT NICETOWN.



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Four Quarters

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Front: "The Old Stone Bridge at Nicetown."
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Marginalia . . .

OPEN LETTER TO SAUL BELLOW

Dear Solly,

This time you've really let them do it to you. The Nobel Prize no less. After Humboldt's Gift, nobody ever mentioned your name without calling you "Pulitzer Prize winning author Saul Bellow." Now it'll be "Nobel laureate Saul Bellow." The National Book Award, it wasn't so bad. Nobody could care that much. But a Nobel Prize! Never may you know peace again.

Even people who never read a book will think you're important. They'll want a piece of you. You think Solzhenitzen was big! Wait till Mike Douglas and Johnny Carson start making counter-offers for your five minutes worth of wisdom. A Nobel Prize winner is a certified wise man, do you doubt it? You'll be as welcome at the White House as Robert Frost used to be. A white-haired Jewish sage from Chicago instead of a Yankee climber of birches. It's more in keeping with the times anyway. And the magazine offers you'll get. No more Commentary or Chicago Review. Playboy will interview you, then put you on a retainer. For sheer money-making, you will make Charlie Citrine, that would-be big-timer from Humboldt's Gift, look like a struggling unknown.

Of course I know popular success means nothing to you. You're a teacher, an intellectual like myself. John Jakes makes money all right, Peter Benchley makes sensational with the movie sales, but for people like us what counts is immortality, am I right? And immortality resides in the classroom. How many dissertations were done on you last year? How many of your books made the assigned reading lists? Listen, Solly, don't get mad. I know you're not exactly a nobody. I just said it: "Pulitzer Prize winning author," and I know that puts you in the big leagues, but the Nobel—that's Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio. Only six other Americans have made it all the way to Stockholm.

Let's see, there was Sinclair Lewis back in 1930, when Lewis was at the top of his game. One home run after another: Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, and probably the best thing he ever did, Dodsworth, the year before he won the Nobel. It was not too popular an award with those who thought Lewis was a schlemiel and Drieser was our greatest writer. Poor Lewis!

(Continued on Page 39)

He Will Take Care of You

ANN JONES

FLORA SAT in the doctor's crowded waiting room for over three hours, and then she got up and left, limping a little on her left foot which had been hurt the other day when she had tripped while getting off the bus on her way home from shopping. At the time, thanks to the little man—a perfect stranger, nobody in her church, nobody in her neighborhood—who had come rushing out of nowhere and caught her in his arms, she had considered it a miracle that she had not gone sprawling out on the sidewalk, and had not paid too much attention to her foot. But when she had gotten home, the foot had begun to swell and turn purple, and Betty Jean, her daughter, had made an awful fuss because she hadn't gone immediately to the doctor. That was the trouble with daughters: they grew up. Never quite as much as they thought they did, but enough to make a nuisance of themselves, poking and prying into every corner of an old lady's life, leaving her no privacy, no margin for error. And I have never been perfect, Flora thought, I need that margin. She has no right to judge me by such lofty standards. I am human, human, human, which is to say, wrong more than half the time, but entirely capable of running my own life, such as it is. She doesn't have to treat me as though I were her child. I am not her child!

Angrily, she hobbled down the corridor toward the elevators. There was no sense in taking up that good doctor's time with what was after all a minor ailment. He had more patients than he could handle. A little epsom salts, a few days of rest, and her ankle would heal itself. She had always been a fast healer, a fact which Betty Jean had chosen to disregard. Reflecting on the condition of most of the people in that waiting room, had been enough to put things into perspective once and for all. The bandaged old eyes, the running noses, the swollen veins, the bloated bodies. Oh, yes, she had seen how lucky she was to have only a sore foot. She could still walk, couldn't she? She could still talk, and hear, and see. Granted, she had had trouble

reading a while back, but since she had discovered, quite by accident, the large-print book section in the library, her problems were over. What a boon those books were. What a blessing. Because of them she would never have to cut short a lifetime habit of reading anything she could get her hands on.

At the row of elevator doors, she paused, looking carefully up and down the empty corridor before pressing the Down button. There was no one in sight. Neither were there any potted palms or near doorways out of which a mugger might leap, but the possibility of attack was never far from her mind. It couldn't be these days if one was to survive. More and more of her old friends and neighbors were being hit over the head, their purses stolen, their apartments broken into. It did not even help if old ladies traveled only in the daylight hours, in groups of three or four or five, and never outside of what used to be considered "good" neighborhoods—even then they were subject to attack by people of all races, of either sex, of any age. You couldn't tell by looking anymore, who was your friend, or who was your enemy. All you could do was stay alert, and hope and pray the next victim would not be you.

Nervously, she watched the arrow signaling the approach of the elevator. Eighteenth floor, seventeenth floor—stop while someone got in or out—Sixteenth floor. The next would be hers. She gripped her purse tightly, prepared to move fast either way depending upon who was or was not inside that elevator, for it was common knowledge that an elevator was absolutely the most dangerous of places. You never knew who might get in with you, or what they might do to you. It was a perfect trap. They could zoom you down to the basement and it would be all over before you knew what had happened.

But this time, the elevator held only a middle-aged priest with a benign pink face, and rimless glasses that had slid down his nose. Almost laughing in relief, she stepped in beside him, the doors remaining open long enough for her to hear, from the office nearest the elevator, the clicking of a typewriter, the ringing of a telephone, and then beginning to close. Instantly, as the doors moved toward each other, Flora realized the terrible mistake she had made, and a spontaneous moan of fear escaped. The priest looked at her in concern, but she had already jumped forward and was jamming her purse in between the closing doors. After all she had been through, after all those warnings, how could she have let appearances deceive her so? Just because he was dressed like a priest didn't mean that he was one, and even if he was, he was still a man, and one thing an old woman did not do was get in an elevator with *any* man!

Her lips quivering with fear, her skin clammy and drained of color, his hand on her shoulder endowing her with supernatural strength, she leapt out into the corridor, and landed full force on her swollen ankle.

"Madam!" the priest gasped, hurrying toward her. "You are ill! Let me help you!"

But she did not hear him, so intent was she on not screaming out her pain and fear and rage.

Two hours later, her ankle tightly bandaged, a prescription for pain pills in her hand, she hobbled out of the taxi which the doctor's nurse had insisted she take and, tipping the driver a generous forty cents, started toward the door of the apartment building where she had lived since the death of her husband, and the transferring of their home to Betty Jean twelve years before. Most of the time now, she felt that she had truly lived nowhere but here in the third floor apartment through whose windows she could catch a glimpse of the shipyard on the island out in the muddy bay, and the long strings of cars carrying workers to and from their jobs. It gave a sense of form to her life. At seven-thirty in the morning, the whistles blew and work began, at four-thirty in the afternoon, the whistles blew and work was ended. Men would come home tired and dirty to women who had spent the day caring for children, cleaning and cooking, washing, mending, gardening, shopping, sewing. She could have gone on and on listing a woman's duties—but women did not do those things today. Of course they didn't. And animals didn't talk, and princes didn't step forward with a glass slipper, and there were no happy endings. She had only to look at Betty Jean for verification of that fact. Betty Jean had never married, pouring all of her youth and middle-age into a cubicle on the island where, overpaid and overtrained, she had spent the years resolving personnel problems that anyone with a lick of commonsense could have prevented from becoming problems in the first place. Flora had heard the details of her job for years, as Betty Jean seemed incapable of talking about anything else. She was not interested in reading. She was not interested in playing bridge, or going to church. And she would never grow up, for it took the rearing of a child to complete the maturing process in a woman. That was the one thing Flora was sure of.

Stepping gingerly up the three steps of the building, she paused to rest, her hand moving familiarly along the row of mailboxes set into the wall. Whatever the doctor had given her to dull the pain had dulled a lot more than that, she thought, fumbling for the key that would unlock her box. She could

hardly see, and felt strangely separated from her awkward, hurting body. Even the objects in her purse seemed unidentifiable to her, as though they belonged to someone else, as though she had never seen them before in her life. Well, it didn't matter if she found the key or not. There wouldn't be any mail other than a Tenant Circular; she knew that. Who was there left to write to an old lady who made a career of not answering letters? And did she really think that this was the day a letter would arrive telling her that she had won the Irish Sweepstakes, the trip around the world, the voyage out of the solar system?

"Well, for goodness sake! Flora Dexter! What are you doing here?"

And there was Mrs. Callahan, her neighbor for all these years looking at her as though she had died and come back a ghost. And then, dear God, Flora remembered: She did not belong here. Months ago, maybe years now, Betty Jean had come and, against her will as Betty Jean was an acquisitive person, sold all the belongings that Flora had not wanted to take with her, and moved her back into the family home which was, after all, still hers, as Betty Jean assured her. "You are no trouble at all, Mother. No trouble, no trouble. I have been planning this for years. I am willing to create an environment in which you can live out your life in safety. No one can hurt you here. I'm willing to do whatever is necessary to keep you happy, and I will never, never, never let you go to one of those god-awful nursing homes, no matter what happens. You hear me? At least I can spare you that. After all you have done for me—if I have to take early retirement to take care of you with my own hands, it will be a small enough price to pay for the pleasure it will give me. You hear me now. You pay attention. No stranger is going to take care of my little mother!"

"Oh, dear," Flora said, sitting down heavily on the top step. She had no right to be here, that was for sure. But where then did she belong? Behind the ugly chain link fence Betty had just had installed around the yard? "For your protection, mother. An extra precaution. I do not want you wandering off and getting lost, or hurt." Inside that ugly old house throbbing with mutilated memories? She did not think so. But she did not know.

"My, my but I'm glad to see you. I've missed you so, Flora. You'll never know. The place just isn't the same without you. The movies we used to go to, the food we ate, the restaurants—remember those weekends in Vegas playing the slots—oh, Flora, why haven't you answered my letters? Why haven't you come to the phone when I called?"

What's done is done, that's why, Flora tried to say, but the words wouldn't come out. What's over is over.

Gently, Mrs. Callahan, all one hundred and sixty out-of-control pounds of her, got Flora to her feet and somehow up to her apartment where she made tea, brought out the sugar cookies she kept in a tin on the highest shelf in the kitchen so she wouldn't be tempted to take a handful everytime she turned around, and talked and talked and talked.

BETTY JEAN sat stiffly in the rocking chair that she herself had been rocked in as a fretful child, and looked at her mother resting peacefully now in the large bed she had shared for so many years with her husband. Thank God she had followed the impulse that had led her to keep every stick of furniture her parents had owned, every dish, every spoon, every pot and pan. It must be a great comfort to her mother now in the hour of need to be surrounded by a past she thought she had lost. So authentic were the surroundings, in fact, that it was not difficult for Betty Jean to ease her mother's failing mind around the pockets of terror into which it was prone to fall, back to the solid happy days when, in an hour or so, she could expect to see her husband, a welder on the island, home from work, slamming his lunch box down on the drainboard in the kitchen, and heading toward the ice box for a cold bottle of beer. It was the least Betty Jean could do for this little woman who had given her the gift of life.

She looked fondly at her mother resting beneath the immaculate quilt her old hands had made years before. Easily identifiable within the sunburst pattern were the scraps of material signifying Betty Jean's march through life via the church, the school, summer camp, trips to the mountains, the seashore, birthday parties, Christmas mornings, Easter egg hunts. It was all there. She closed her eyes, resting, thankful that she had kept the quilt wrapped carefully in layers of tissue paper, laid away all these years in the bottom of the cedar chest which had been her mother's gift of hope to her, and a pain in Betty Jean's consciousness since the moment she had laid eyes on it. But the quilt was what was important now. It looked so pure in the afternoon sunlight, so pristine, so immaculately untouched in spite of all the years it had been used. She could picture it wrapped cosily around her mother in the casket, going with her into eternity.

Flora groaned, and Betty Jean, half asleep, jerked forward and began patting her gently on the back, uttering the nonsense

words that had been spoken to her when she was a child needing comfort. And so it goes full circle, she thought, as her mother burped and fell back to sleep. Why she had gone all the way over to Mrs. Callahan's alone, on her injured foot, was a mystery. Thank goodness Mrs. Callahan had eventually gathered her wits together and phoned Betty Jean to come for her; any fool should have been able to see right away that her mother was not well.

Actually Betty Jean should never have left her alone in the doctor's office, but she had seemed so well that morning in spite of her foot, so normal, that it had seemed perfectly reasonable at the time to leave her with instructions not to go out of the office until Betty Jean came for her. And it had given Betty Jean a rare few moments of freedom in which to race around the corner and pick up a dozen pair of panty hose that were on sale, shop for groceries, a chore she always put off until the last minute, and even to stop by the nursery to buy a Ragged Robin climbing rose like the one that used to grow by the front bedroom window. It was to have been a surprise for her mother who had seemed so well that morning, so sane. But the surprise, of course, had been on Betty Jean.

"Oh, God," she prayed fervently, "if only you had made me wiser."

An hour passed during which Flora did not move. Betty Jean got up quietly and slipped into the kitchen to make herself a drink. It was an indulgence, she realized that, but it was also an incentive, a reward for having lived through one more difficult day. If only, if only love were not so treacherous. She finished her drink standing by the kitchen sink, and made another. If only love were different, or more safe—or *she* were different, and didn't need safety. If only she had been born as innocent as her mother was right to this day, but somehow Betty Jean had always known too much. Even as a child she had realized that "falling in love" was about as safe as falling off the Empire State building. Finishing her drink, she made another, almost managing this time not to feel guilty.

FLORA FELT her daughter's hand smoothing her hair, adjusting the blankets, fussing with her pillow. Leave me alone! she wanted to scream. I have been your mother all my life, must I now become the child you never had the courage to have?

But she didn't say anything out loud, having refused to talk until Betty Jean gave her back the teeth she had removed without permission. The world was so ugly. Power was given to all the wrong people. Flora accepted this fact as she accepted

the sudden corruption of her body. It was time to go. She smiled, waiting. Why had she always been so afraid of muggers and robbers and rapists when the ultimate thing they could have stolen from her was only her life? Why she would give that life gladly to them now if they were around, and what a relief it was to feel this way. Her tight little body, relaxing for the first time in years, almost reached the climax toward which it had been striving all day: a final separation from the world which she conceived of as emotion continually erupting into self-perpetuating forms that fed upon each other, pressing closer and closer with their suffocating needs, killing, obscuring, hating the stirring of the void, the craving for space with which living organisms are endowed.

At times she almost believed that a separation had been accomplished, but a word from Betty Jean, a need, a touch, and she was back where she had started, still connected to the world by the emotional umbilical cord that fed her and fed her and fed her, refusing to let her die. Why are identities so well hidden? she wondered. Why can't my daughter see me as I am? I am not trying to hide. Who is she seeing when she looks at me?

And it wasn't only Betty Jean. She recalled Mrs. Callahan looking at her in alarm, as though Flora had been threatening to leap out of the second story window and land ignominiously on the Bermuda grass lawn, when all she had been doing was watching how easily a gull soared over the channel's silver waves, how pure it looked, dissolving confidently into the lowering fog, placing itself forever beyond hope or love.

In that blessed moment, for the first time, a small severing had taken place. Flora had felt pain of all kinds recede; an agonizing tension, finally released, had caused blocked tears to flow, and before she knew what was happening, she had become the servant of a lucidity so powerful, there was a question if she would be strong enough to bear it. Timidly, testing its effects, she had turned toward Mrs. Callahan who had headed immediately for the phone, a half-eaten cookie in her hand. Flora remembered nothing after that, except that when she had awakened in the double bed of her marriage it had been a special agony to find that she was her plain old normal self again. It was as though she had left her home for a vacation, had had a wonderful time, made many new friends, almost hadn't returned, and returning finally out of duty, had discovered how shabby her house was, how mundane, how uninhabitable. Oh, how she had fought to remain free of it. Why? she had screamed silently, why, why, why must I stay here?

"Because you are my mother," Betty Jean had explained

reasonably. "Because I need you. I have no one but you. There are so many things I haven't done for you yet, places I have not taken you, gifts I have not given you—"

Flora cried out. Betty Jean's hands, continuing their movement over her body, slid down beneath the soft pink gown, checking, checking, checking, until in sad response, Flora felt the urine slip out of her weak body, the movement in her intestine preluding the pile of excrement she would soon deposit on the spring-violet pattern of the percale sheet. When this had been accomplished, she waited for her reward, having done well a very difficult trick for which she had been carefully trained.

"I knew it," Betty Jean said, sucking air between her clenched teeth. "I knew it would come to this."

Without moving her lips or opening her eyes, Flora smiled. She had done as Betty Jean wanted, and that was her only reason for remaining on earth: to please Betty Jean. After that she could leave; that part of it was very simple. But there were still the plague-ridden dreams that blended her waking and sleeping hours into one composite unit until she rarely knew if it was night or day. Because of their persistence, her life spun on and on. She knew what they were doing to her, and that she would have to learn to control them, but it was very difficult to fast, to deny herself the protein, the calories, the carbohydrates of the past. It was against nature. Even now the Camp Meeting she had attended years and years ago with her young husband was reconstructing itself around her. The excitement that had risen in her then rose in her now. "God will take care," they had sung, were singing. "He will take care . . . He will take care . . . God will take care . . . He will take care . . . God will take care of you." The clapping and swaying, the dusty smell of the tent with its rolled up sides allowing a view of the summer storm approaching over the alfalfa fields, the changing light, the heavy thud of thunder, the flash of lightning. And the body of her husband, caught in the spell, moving of its own accord, up and down, back and forth, swaying toward her, and then away, encompassing her until she did not know who she was, or where she had come from, or when she had collapsed in his arms and been carried to the ditch bank and covered by his big body.

"Mother!" Betty Jean screamed. "Mother, you just stop that! Stop it right now! Am I to be spared nothing?" And reaching down into the diaper, she pulled back the offending hand, wanting to cut it off, to nail it to the door as a warning to an innocent world: a self-molester lives here! Danger!

Danger!

Again, Flora smiled. And this time she had a right to, for the tired old flesh had finally not responded to stimulation, was giving up, was letting her go. At what age, reason? At any age, at *my* age! When she allowed herself to open her eyes, Betty Jean, in a pitiful attempt to divert her mother from the fragile joys of her container-body, had hung a bird-form mobile over her bed, and this made Flora laugh out loud. What a long way her daughter had to go before she discovered who she was. The junk of a lifetime would have to be discarded. Oh, Flora was glad she would not have to be a witness to that heavy scene.

The days went by, or at least the light changed on the mobile, the little birds, whirled by vagrant breezes, scooting this way and that, accompanied by a tinkling sound, like tiny pieces of glass crashing together. This sound often claimed Flora's attention now, but she did not know if it came from the bright birds themselves or from the windbell she could see hanging just outside the window, and she did not like to ask Betty Jean, who seemed much more content now that her mother seemed to have lost the power of speech.

Although she had told her mother that she had retired from her job, it was Flora's hope that she had only taken an extended leave of absence, and had left herself something to return to when Flora decided to die. Which would be soon, although oddly enough, now that she found it was in her power to go whenever she wanted, she found herself procrastinating, trying to fit the parts together while there was still time, trying to learn once and for all how this blessing had come to be hers. It would be something if she could pass it on to her daughter, as a legacy against the future. But try as she might, there were great gaps in her recall. She remembered very clearly however, the moment when she had decided to let her body do, without restraint, the strange little things it had to do: digesting, eliminating, masturbating, hoping that once it discovered it was receiving no sensation-reward, it would stop everything, and let her go; this moment seemed to her to be the key to her existence.

Meanwhile, Betty Jean was kept busy changing her diapers, rubbing oil on her old skin, powdering her with sweet smelling talcum, polishing her nails, brushing her hair, changing her gown, cutting her toenails, singing to her, crying over her, spooning ever-softer food into the proper opening, until, for Flora, being alive was no more than taking a walk on a summer evening and seeing the stars reflected in the water of the big irrigation ditch down by the barn. When she felt herself being

lifted out of the bed and, cradled in Betty Jean's arms, recognized the squeak of the old rocking chair, was enfolded by the warmth of her daughter's compulsive body, had accepted the final offering of the warm teat, she did not protest, recalling how illusory are all of our freedoms, even the final one.

Haunting The Witch's House

RUTH MOOSE

We hid in the hedge
threw stones to make the ole dog whine;
the bones he chewed looked human still.
Tomorrow hers.
She'd screeched her last, "Stay off my grass."

Soap saved for weeks
was enough for every screen,
a hundred windows at least.

Too warm in witch's black, wet behind our masks,
we rang trick or treat, waited our chance.
No one as mean as she should live . . .
not in our neighborhood.
Invited in, we went
a room of marble and mirrors,
velvet; the rug was roses.
We looked for ovens she'd trap us in,
cages we knew were there.

From a silver tray she served us
marshmallows melted on soda crackers,
cocoa from a china pot, whipped cream in points
we licked with our tongues. Could poison taste so good?

The ring on her smallest finger caught the light.
We were held in her eye, the girl in her voice
laughed at books, brown photos of camels in Cairo,
steamer trunks and the World's Fair in 1905.

We left at nine, soap stinging our pockets.
Let into the world of the lonely,
we had escaped, but not unscathed.

1.

Once I was afraid of the dead.
Afraid of the skeletal—what chair
is to lap.

And it's true
They bear us up.

2.

Wood is theirs. We know
sometimes there will be a knocking,
unexplained, from the most
domestic objects. The smallest stub
of pencil can be a door
they report at.

3.

In a dream, a gray
dream, a young boy sees them
side by side, in military
formation.

This is the way it is.
Each one, issued the uniform.

4.

And I never saw it,
till now, this army
settling the country
ahead for us.

5.

Or sometimes, overnight, a tree
will blossom.
The dead
bugler, trumpeting.

From Sea To Shining

ELEANOR SHIEL ZITO

Young one May morning
among amorphous dunes of Provincetown,
listening with cocked ear to passionate surf,
shunning white sand like a rock-bound Puritan
and the Portugese with their nets fishing
livelihoods from the bountiful Atlantic.

Thinking back, a sun sinking
in a pink Pacific late one dreamy autumn,
taking a bus to Laguna, on the sands
a chicano Christ matching my footprints,
finding a conch on a wave-tip, smiling:
Worthwhile if one gets out the snail.

Cornflowers thigh high,
sun and shadow on the shore of Lake Ontario;
in the sky Great Spirit; I and Judy Israel,
children at our knee, breast, everywhere,
wild cries splitting golden air, all wading,
catholic, carefree in the welcome waves.

Fleeing the pallid sun
to Florida baptisms, pascal lilies
and the black cabana man running, pulling me
from the black shadow passing with its fin—
hugging him happily on the sand's breast,
looking up gratefully to a blue mantle.

Twilight on the Fourth of July,
company on the beach, Philadelphia crowd,
numerous as the grains beneath, stars overhead,
watching the fireworks, rockets and the one
moon candle, heaven's eye, out sharing—
outstaying all our bright flares.

Snowball

JANE GWYNN KEANE

A CAR WHOOSHED past up on the main road, its tires briefly nasal on the concrete of the bridge. The boy on the old abandoned road below did not bother to glance up. He could not have seen anyway over the sheered red clay bluff. Nor could he have been seen though the roads paralleled—the highway along the rim of the bluff, the old road at its base—except by the most energetic of backseat passengers who, leaning far enough out, would have glimpsed a black child carrying something radiantly white which the mind would know had to be an animal. And beyond the child, skirted by the narrow road he followed, a broad, bowl-like basin, 200 feet deep at its center, that was filled and webbed over—even immense trees—by a labyrinthine tangle of apparently dead grey vine. It was kudzu, capable of extending rank, coarse-leaved tendrils fifty yards in every direction in a season and was far from dead; like a charging giant stunned by the first frost it had only not yet, in very earliest spring, roused.

Happily engrossed in conversation, the boy strolled slowly. He ignored the old ruts, clay hard as backbone; he waded instead down the slap-middle of the road, through the waist high weeds as though a green and pleasant stream, the puffball of a puppy cradled high, to facilitate the conversation.

"Whuts you want Roy Earl to call you, baby?" he asked, his voice tenderly falsetto. "You wants Old Jake to be yo name? huh?" The puppy's little eyes, bright as blackberries under the white lashes, watched his face, the peaked ears pricked forward as if listening intently. "Does dis baby like dat name? does you?"

All it really was was playlike: once he got done studying on it, now this dog was to be named Snowball. Dog this white *obliged* to be called Snowball; he knew that. Still it was fun, he thought, moseying along home with this soft little puppydog in his arms, making up names to say out loud (*Trixie. Puff like dat old cat in de book at school. Little Bit.*), with little hoppergrasses flinging themselves straight up from and falling

back like rain into the tall grass. And birds too singleminded with spring to fly only hopping out his path.

"Biggety old bird," he muttered at a joree trilling away on the topmost limb of a pinkish willow. He narrowed his eyes to take imaginary aim. "You sho wouldn't be busing yo gut bragging if I'da brung my slingshot. But, shoot—I got me somepin mo important to tote today." He grinned down at his dog. ("How come dat white woman to want to give you a dawg, boy? She sell dem dawgs. Yvonne say dem dawgs wuf a hunnerd dollars in Albany": that's what his daddy, Willie George, had said. And then his uncles, old Big Mac and Lonnie, had had to put in their mouths: "Hoo-oo. Dat old white bitch spoofing you, boy. She aint ghy give way one of dem dawgs." Not lessen it bawn wid two head, she aint.")

The puppy's tiny blackrimmed pink mouth grinned back.

—Or was it only panting? He could feel, under the silky fur, its ribcage heaving. *Dis chyer a sam-o-yed dawg*, he told himself. *All did hair so it can drag dem sleds through de snow*, *Miss Louise say*. Solicitously he peered into the eager black eyes. "Is you hot widout yo snow, baby?" He strolled a trifle faster.

The deepcut creek breathed up coolly on Roy Earl. He walked to the middle of the swaybacked bridge no car could have crossed and gently lowered the puppy and squatted beside it. While the puppy worried his shirt-tail, he sat for a few minutes savoring the damp mud smell, the busy murmur, like Roxelle humming at her work, of the swift brown water.

He then scooped up the unwilling puppy again, and rising, set about carefully and seriously to point out the sights to it. "Down by dat ere bend whereabouts I do my swimming.—Naw, baby, you looking way yonder too close. I ghy call you Blindie. Dat by dat great old big blackgum, see? You git you a little bit bigger, I larn you how to swim. Look crost de old gully now." He indicated across the wasteland of vine a shingled roof. "Dat where yo mama is. And down dat away—" he pointed to a cabin the color of driftwood which hunched like an ailing animal on four rock pilings, "where all us stay at."

A jungle-like growth pressed close about the small cabin. Only a moat of bare swept earth seemed to hold it at bay. The sagging front porch faced the defunct roadway.

His great-granddaddy Big Pap grumbled about that road. "Eber since dem WPA folks put dat paved *gov-mint* road crost de bluff up dere, folks done fergit dis little piece of road. Usa been—" grumbled his aggrieved voice, from the porch, the rocker by the fire, the straight chair set out for him under the

trees, "dis chyer de onliest way to any place. Folks up and down it all de *time*. Cars. Trucks. Wagons. Oxcarts eben. Gawn to de gristmill afore dat burn. On to de planermill. And disawy, folks heading in to town on Saddy. Busy. *Real busy.*"

The old way didn't lead anywhere now; only from Miss Louise and Mr. Dick's place to where they stayed. Nobody bothered with it any more, except for Big Pap and Miss Louise —on account of the puppy—him. The rest of the folks walked up to the highway. Ordinarily, he just crossed the gully; that old kudzu didn't scare him. Looped from creekbank to creekbank on a hairy vine, snatched up the split-handled hoe he kept handy case of cottonmouths and went hightailing it down on the footpath his bare feet had worn.

"Now up yonder way—" firmly he redirected the fuzzy head. "By de new bridge? Dat where me and Lonnie cотches us de school bus. Cept dat old Lonnie, he dont go to school no mo. But dont you let on to Roxelle. Lemme splain it to you . . ." He leaned back against the rusty iron railing of the bridge, cheek pillowed on the warm, downy fur; comfortably settled, he proceeded. "Well, see now dat Lonnie sixteen, de old law lady caint come snooping round no mo. But eber mawning, Roxelle rouses him out. And if he stay to home, she jaw at him all day bout gitting his larning. So dat how come old Lonnie to ride de bus mawnings, to git shet of Roxelle jawing to git him a ride in to town.

"And, man, do he swing! He go down to do Alley, hang round wid old Big Mac and his friends. Git to lissen to de jukebox and drink cawn likker. Truck on down to de cafe where his girl work at. Or dey all hunker down on de sidewalk and lissen to dat cat from Chi-ca-go, de one whut shuow um how to plait deir hair into all dese chyer little tee-ninecy cawnrows."

Roy Earl watched the dappled water moving beneath his feet. He thought of what old Big Mac was all the time saying about Miss Louise and giggled. ("One dese days, dat old broke-back bridge ghy bust under gat goddamn tub of lard.") He knew the truth of the matter though; Big Mac just didn't want Miss Louise messing round his side of the creek because she had run him off hers. He had been up there tending to her dogs when Miss Louise came out to the kitchen and threatened if Big Mac showed his face up there again, trying to worry money out Yvonne, she would telephone for the sheriff.

Cou'se, he thought reflectively, watching the rapid current, Big Mac claim it Miss Louise whut put Yvonne up to quitting him in de fust place.

("Nemmine—" Big Pap had rared back in his rocker.

"Nemmine, Miss Louise. Maybe she vise her, but when Yvonne walk out here, she done her walking on her own two foots."

"Wonner how dat goddamn old white bitch like for me to go up dere and vise her on how to keep Mr. Dick to home nights? Out dat cafe and all dem goodlooking little white highschool girls. How she like me to go putting my mouf in *her* business?"

Roy Earl looked up from the water. He mused to the puppy, "You know whut dis chyer old creek is? Dis de Chatuala, whut de Indians use to own." He grinned. "Maybe you wants you a Indian name.

"Here. Quit dat wiggling." He shoved himself erect, setting the old bridge aquiver. "Does you want to hear about the time Mr. Dick's gristmill burnt?" he asked sternly. "Den you better hold still.

"Down in de gully dere, in the dip right by de creek? dat where bouts it was. Big Pap, he work in dat mill. De night it burn was black as de insides of yo fist, but Big Pap say dat sky light up like day. And all dese men hollering and pigeons, hunnerds of pigeons, circling and circling, cause dey babies trapped inside. Meanness all whut left in dat old gully now, Big Pap say, cottonmoufs and kudzu."

(Big Pap leaned to spit off the porch. "De *gov-mint* say for Mr. Dick to put dat kudzu out. Say hit ghy keep dem burnt over slopes frum washing. He sot it out. It taken holt. And now de devil hisself caint git shet of it. Wont sprise me none iffen I wake up some mawning and caint rise out my bed, cause dat kudzu done come wrop itself round me in de night.")

Already the kudzu had edged over the light wires to their side of the creek and commenced to swallow up the trees, the prehensile tendrils groping hungrily from earth to tree to earth again, to leave in its green wake a swollen bulge like a huge undigested egg a mammoth snake had swallowed whole.

The puppy began to whimper. "You tired, aint you, baby?" crooned the boy. Dazzling flecks of sunlight sifted through the overhung trees onto the dog's white coat. He touched his lips to one, then rubbed the tickle off on his shirt sleeve. All at once his stomach shivered with eagerness to go show the folks his dog. He thought, *Eben Sandy Claus aint neber brung me nutting dis fine.*

"Come on den, if you tired," he crooned in the falsetto he reserved for endearment, "Roy Earl ghy take dis baby *home*."

The only folks there were the ones who almost never left: old Big Pap; Roxelle, his daughter who tended to him; and his, Roy Earl's baby sister Selma. But this meant that he got to show off his puppy more than once. For no sooner had they

gotten done feeling of it—Big Pap cocking his head to try to see it out the good part of his eye, Selma squeezing too tight and squalling when he pulled it away, and Roxelle had told him what all she'd do to him if he let that dog mess up in her house—than just then the white folks that his grandma, Lily, helped let her out up on the new bridge.

Lily was the very best to show something to. She was as different, all soft lap and easy laughing, from old shut-mouth Roxelle as his coffee was mornings, hot and strong and bitter-tasting when he first poured it out the pot, after he had stirred in a whole mess of milk and sugar. Anytime he had something to show to Lily, she clapped her hands and took on like it was the prettiest sight she ever laid her eyes on—no matter what it was, a turkey picture he had colored at school or a buckeye he found in the woods, anything Lily liked.

It was a little past sundown. His young uncles, Lonnie and Big Mac, had bummed a ride from town on the back of a pickup, and his daddy had walked in from his job at the planermill, and he had showed them all his dog.

Old Big Mac had tried to rag him. "Dat sho do look like a white man's dawg. You take some soot to dat dawg, boy, or hit aint ghy live here wid me." But he could tell that even Big Mac admired it.

They were done with supper and were taking the breeze outside. Roxelle had brought out two straight chairs and she and Big Pap sat together as if beneath a giant parasol under the chinaberry in the front yard and quietly took their ease: old Big Pap leaned on his stick, mumbling; Roxelle, tall and still, the hands that had been busy all day slack on the starched white apron which, with her light headrag, defined her in the gloom. Behind them, occasional laughter and loud argumentative talk arose from the porch steps, where Lily and her boys, Willie George, Big Mac and Lonnie, visited together. The crickets had started up and Roy Earl and the puppy were chasing around catching lightening bugs for Selma to squash. It got dark fast in the hollow. The humped trees the kudzu had smothered loomed tall and black like ruined chimneys against the pale sky. The puppy's white fur seemed to gleam as it tumbled about in the dusk, yipping shrilly at the children's heels. Roy Earl heard Lily call out to somebody, and just as he had expected, there across the old bridge tripped Miss Louise, lugger a crockersack of dog ration.

For almost half his ten years, Roy Earl had been fooling with Miss Louise's dogs; he knew just exactly how to mix up the food and how much to give, but he let her tell him all over

again. Everybody else stood around and listened, too.

Lily said, "Yessum, Miss Louise, we sho is ghy take care of dis dawg. Dat boy *proud* of dis dawg, Lawd! Much obliged, you giving it to him."

And when Miss Louise said, "Now, Roxelle, don't you let Big Mac sell this boy's dog," everybody laughed and said, "No, ma'm. Nome, Miss Louise. Aint ghy sell dis dawg."

Roy Earl helped Big Pap walk a piece of the way back with Miss Louise. If they weren't a sight together! Big Pap, no thicker than a peach switch, bent over his stick and cocking his head to see how to step, and big old Miss Louise waddling along on her little bitty feet, fat as a hogshead in a dress. He wanted to bust out laughing, but he knew better, because Big Pap thought a mighty lot of Miss Louise. He had been knowing her back since she first married Mr. Dick, before she put on flesh. All the time Big Pap was saying, "Dat one goodhearted white lady. She sholy holp me out wid my girls when Belle pass. Give um all clothes, driv um in to town to de doctor when dey took sick, find jobs for um."

As the oldest of the three—May, the middle girl, had gone North—Roxelle had helped Miss Louise up to the house, until Lily's babies started to keep her home; then for years after that she washed for her. It had not been, in fact, until Roxelle had begun to draw a check, old age and blindness, for Big Pap, that Miss Louise would agree to a washing machine.

Miss Louise spoke often, too, to Roy Earl of her regard for Big Pap. "The Lord has seen us over a mountain of troubles together and Big Pap has never one time let me down. You grow up fine as your great-granddaddy, Roy Earl, and we'll be mighty proud of you. He is one good old nigra."

Sure enough, as soon as old Big Pap had shuffled back from the bridge, he started in to bragging on Miss Louise. Big Mac, on the middle porch step, hawked loudly and spat in the dirt and kicked at it with his heel.

SNOWBALL miss his mama and cried some that night, but Roy Earl kept him right close to his side of the bed in a box and he would reach down and pet him and talk to him and he hushed every time. The next morning the puppy woke him early and he lifted it over into the bed and let it run up and down sniffing and licking at his and Selma's faces. He tried to show Selma how to pet it easy; but Snowball thought she was playing and grabbed her fat baby hand with his little pointed teeth and started shaking it, and Selma went to bawling.

Their mama Nora had left for her shift at the new shirt factory before he had brought the puppy home the day before. She got up around dinnertime and came out on the porch, cigarette and Coca-Cola in one hand, pick in the other, and started picking her hair in the mirror hanging by the front door. Roy Earl was tearing around the yard, the puppy and Selma both stumbling over their own feet in their eager efforts to keep up; he came skidding up when he saw her. He could tell by her sulky face she had not appreciated their racket.

"Miss Louise want to come over here and feed dat dawg, she sho as hell can. How come she want to give it to you, noway?"

"Yeah, boy—" called Big Mac. He was lying on a tattered old carseat out by Roxelle's washpot, a new plaid cap pulled down even with his nose. "Whut you haf to do to git dat dawg? Who wanting to give you presents up dere, dat fat old bitch or it Mr. Dick? I know he like dem girls mighty young."

"Shet yo mouf—" Nora yelled. As if in reaction she bent and absently patted Snowball, then knocked him away as the puppy began leaping up on her, hungry for more attention.

IT WAS SURELY one hard thing to do. Wheeling abruptly, Roy Earl booted the dog sharp in the ribs and at the same instant bellowed, "Git on home, dawg. Hit de grit. Git!"

Snowball yelped shrilly and shrank back. Again Roy Earl yelled at it, and, puzzled, the puppy crept back toward the house. When he saw it crawl under the porch, he continued on toward the thicket.

Hard or not, he had it to do. Two things Miss Louise had made him promise: to keep this dog out the highway, and not one time, ever, bring it back to her house.

"You let that dog learn the way over here, Roy Earl, and you won't be able to keep him home. It'll be up here all the time, hanging around this pen, keeping my dogs riled up, and you know Mr. Dick wouldn't stand for that."

Roy Earl sure did know. He kept out that man's way. Mr. Dick one hot-tempered somebody.

"And Snowball dont sull none," he told himself. "When I git back tirectly, he be running out, wiggling hisself, barking . . ." But he did wish he could show him off to Cilla. Of course, she had seen it in the litter, but that was before it was his dog. Next to Lily, he had rather show things to Cilla than to most anybody. "But, shoot—" he thought glumly, jerking his pantsleg free of a briar, "dere aint no way."

They had never talked about why Cilla did not come to his side of the creek. Yet there seemed to be an understanding that it would not be wise. Roy Earl thought of what all Big Mac would say about his playing with a white girl; he figured Cilla worried over what her daddy might think. It was like the swimming-pool; they didn't need to say it out loud to know.

Since Cilla stayed up there all day in the summertime, Mr. Dick had piped in water from the creek to make the pool for her. It was the very same water Roy Earl swam in, but it looked different in the blue-bottomed pool, and he like to stick in his hand or dabble his feet in it. Sometimes when he ran up and down beside her while she paddled, hollering to her or chunking her a ball, he had considered falling in, accidental-like; but he never had. And Cilla had never asked why he didn't join her.

Everything else between them was so open, easy, that when they played together, he just slap out forgot she was a girl, much less a white girl. Once he had even asked about her mama. He was scared she'd be mad—her mama was crazy and stayed locked up in Milledgeville, that was how come Miss Louise to keep her every day after school until her daddy, Mr. Dick's brother, got off work. But there was no problem. Right off, without a bobble, she had answered, "People's heads can take sick same as their stomachs. My mom has to stay in the hospital to make her head get well."

Cilla looked like a play-pretty, with all this long yellow curly hair, and these fancy dresses Miss Louise sewed for her, but when she got her jeans on, that child could run. She could shimmy up a pinetree before he could think about it. And cart-wheels! To flip the way she did, she had to have rubberbands instead of bones.

And she could think up more things to play. Things he had never heard tell of. Sometimes they played pioneer, and she said they were trying to wrest the land from the Indians. Another day, they'd be the Indians. Or they would be slaves, trying to slip off to a secret meeting and get home before the paddyrollers caught them.

He could throw better though, and he was not nearly as scared of snakes as she was. One time when he killed a copper-head they had run up on in some high grass, she and Miss Louise had bragged on him like he had killed a gator. He had toted the hoe around for about a week, looking for its mate to kill. He grinned to himself. "And dont matter how hard I tries, I caint larn dat child to whistle."

He heard and smelled the creek and felt the cool dampness

before, through the inert tangle of matted vines and Spanish moss that interwove the dense trees along the steep bank, he pushed into clear view of it. He slid on his heel down the leafy mud, caught the gnarled vine hand over hand and shoved off. He sailed wide and low over the glimmering water and dropped lightly off on the other side.

BY THE TIME school let out for the summer, late in May, Snowball was a big old booger and Roy Earl had him trained good. Roxelle, Big Pap, all the folks, had grown real fond of him. Big Mac, of course, had to run his big mouth and call him a 'honkie dawg', but Roy Earl wasn't studying him.

The only problems were that Snowball still played too rough with Selma, and that Big Mac played too rough with Snowball. Every minute Big Mac was quarreling at him, trying to sic him on somebody or making him snap at a stick, fight with an old rag.

"Whut you trying to do to dat dawg?" Roxelle would demand. "Leb him lone. You ghy make him mean."

And there were, of course, little problems. Once when Roy Earl whistled and Snowball jumped from the porch, he knocked off two of Roxelle's bucket flowers and they busted all to pieces. Another time he chewed up a pair of highheel shoes Nora had only just got done paying for.

As the summer progressed though, Snowball got in his second teeth and began to outgrow his puppy ways. With him Roy Earl rambled over half the county, avoiding only the highway and Miss Louise's. Any time that boy was not off some place with the dog, he was up to Miss Louise's bragging on him to Cilla.

Roxelle grumbled. She had to tend to Selma while Roy Earl was gone and get all her work done, too.

But Big Pap told her, "Dat boy know he done lost someping. He caint stay home. Caint know no peace. He hongry for it. Only de Lawd can give him whut he looking for."

Selma had been the only baby of Willie George and Nora not born a twin and Roy Earl the only twin to live. He had come into this world before his time, already agrieving for his brother.

Since the clinic lady had come down, Nora hadn't had any more babies. Big Mac argued, "Dat goddamn honkie don't want no mo nigger babies bawn. Dat how come she down here putting her mouf in yo business."

"Shit!" Nora retorted. "Aint never seen you wid no big belly."

To Roy Earl it seemed a peculiar thing, who the Lord gave out babies to. He knew how the babies got here, what he couldn't figure was how the Lord decided who to give children to. There Miss Louise was, with her Sunday School class and her Brownie Girl Scouts, all the time she was fooling with children, yet the Lord hadn't given her one baby. And Roxelle with no babies, she was the one to do all the tending to. His mama and Lily, they were too busy. His mama had to be off sewing. And Lily, she had been in town helping the Carltons since she was fifteen years old. She slept over there whenever their babies were newborn, went off to Florida with them in the summer. It appeared to him that when that horn tooted up there on the main road for her every morning, Lily was mighty pleased to go.

ALL THE SIGNS that fall had pointed to hard winter. But the cold was late coming. There was hardly frost enough to nip back the kudzu. On Christmas Day they had a fire in the fireplace but with the front door propped open. Then, just as folks were thinking of getting their beans and corn in the ground, here came a freeze.

Shivering, Roy Earl ran his hands down deep into Snowball's thick, soft coat and wished he had fur. He had never seen a foxbrush richer than Snowball's curled plume of a tail. "Dis sho one pretty looking dawg," he thought proudly.

After the late cold, came rain. It was like the bottom of the sky had given way. The roof leaked in on Big Pap till he took sick, and the creek boiled past with whole trees churning in its foam. Water heavy with clay silt backed up into the gully to make an angry red sea of the kudzu. Moccasins hunting high ground were crawling everywhere. No one dared step out without a stick or a hoe, or a gun if he had one. It was worrisome, having to keep Snowball and Selma underfoot all day. For a week the old bridge stayed under water; everybody said for sure it had washed to Jerico this time.

But when the waters receded, the bridge was still standing, a board or two more gone, and covered with slime, but still there.

It was the first dry day when Miss Louise came.

Roxelle and Roy Earl, braving the snakes, had gone to gather more sticks for the washpot, so Roxelle could catch up on all the clothes she hadn't washed in so long. Snowball had been commanded to stay in the backyard to keep Selma out the fire.

There would have been no answer if she called first at the closed front door. Probably she noticed the smoldering fire and started on around to the backyard, picking her way, on the minute feet that always looked ridiculously inadequate for their burden of fat, through the muck daintily, the great doubled-handled bucket of soup—for Roy Earl had told her about Big Pap—balanced against her barrel belly, calling for Roxelle.

No doubt Snowball growled a warning. But with Miss Louise figuring she knew dogs so well, she didn't likely pay him any mind; just came on, confidently, half-blinded maybe by the steam from the pot she clutched against the big jutting abdomen—which caused her to appear at all times, like all the extremely stout, to be leaning comfortably backwards—tipping on through the muck and calling.

At the back corner of the cabin, the dog attacked: slashed the flaccid unresisting flesh of an arm, then again sprang—a fearful revelation to materialize suddenly in the fragrant steam, ears flattened, lips curled to the gum, eyes red—to rip open a hand, sending the scalding soup down her huge bosom.

Mr. Dick must have thought about snakes—maybe he had even walked with her, toting the soup bucket, grumbling, and waited for her on the old bridge; for seconds later, when he dashed toward the screaming, his .22 was in his hand.

And when they, Roxelle and Roy Earl, emerged, stumbled out, from deep in the thicket, still hugging the stick or two each they had not dropped in attempting to hurry, the rifle was already aimed.

There was no one instant when Roy Earl saw the white man with the gun. Saw his precious Snowball. Heard the screaming from the white woman, the blast, the yelping, the second blast. It was just there, suddenly, in his mind like a crater following a dynamite explosion: dust cleared and there was nothing left in his mind but this, the aftermath of an explosion.

Everything else seemed far off, unreal.

The woman, the tears running down her face, the soup and blood down her dress front, promising to bring him another puppy.

The man cursing, "I told you these goddamn niggers dont want you over here."

Selma hollering.

It was not until night that he seemed able to hear words again. Everybody talking at him. Jawing. Sitting at the supper table, choosing with a finger, first one, then another, of the

familiar patterns in the peeling oilcloth to follow, abandon, he heard the voices, the words now, listening to the familiar patterns the voices made, hearing them in a new way: Lily trying to cheer him up; shut-mouth Roxelle sounding grieved; old Big Pap croaking weakly from his sickbed; his daddy, Willie George; and his uncles, Lonnie and old Big Mac—his big mouth the loudest of all.

Golden Pachyderms

DAVID B. HUNTER

They do love I think
With ponderous effect
Not indifferently, without concern
But with such a slow
Enormous fixing of the feet
Such solid preparation
For the mounted groaning weight
That lovers from a different desert
Might not know
(By which I mean, to intimate)
The fragile stroke of trunk
Upon the neck
Or slack and flaccid chin,
Or suspect
(Though I do not mention heart)
A certain movement from within.

For My Son On His First Scarring

SAMUEL GREEN

I decide on one last smack of the pillow
before bed, and you fall like a dropped
Teddy Bear. Except your head hits an empty
creme soda can with a crack like a crab leg
breaking. Dark blood comes fast and clean
from a bone-deep gash beneath your eye,
covers the cheek in bright streams.

My own father might have said: "Good, the color
shows you're healthy, kid," like the time
I nearly hacked off a finger with my Bowie knife.
But I lack my father's calm, vise you to my chest
in alarm, cry so hard your mother has to take over.

On the way to Emergency you curl still
in her arms, bleed silently into a dishtowel.
My stomach shrinks to a raisin.
I'm thinking of all the wounds I've opened:
when I shot my little sister in the back
with a BB gun and she dropped like a hit squirrel,
or when my fist ripped my brother's lips
so bad he had to drink soup for a week.

At last the hospital grows out of the hill
before us, the moon above the top floor
looking like a sharp lid of a tin can.
The night nurse greets us frowning,
eyes dull as dry stones.
Blank faced doctors rush a cardiac case past
on a guerney, close enough so his limp fingers
brush your mother's coat. His friend, breath rank
as bilge, mumbles to us and reels down the hall.

I cradle you on my lap, watch you suck a bottle
of apple juice, marvel at how forgiving children are.
Only when the doctor begins his careful work,
and I watch every stick of the needle lace
up the flapping white skin, only then do I feel
the wound in that unlocatable area of the heart
begin its patient mending.

Carousel

(for Moira Alice)

CLAUDE KOCH

Tell me of Periwig, Silly, and Shawn,
Le manages de chevaux de bois,
Dragon chariot, two-faced horse,
Roundabouts, and gallopers;
Tell of the centaur, the tilt for the ring,
The tootle and steam of the *kally-ope* . . .

With Father singing as 'round she goes
Oh, the honeysuckle and the rose,
Oh, the honeysuckle and the rose!
And whirl away on the planet's course,
Spring at the center, the world's a lark,
The unhorsed heroes mocking the dark . . .

In the mirrors and lights near the trolley park
By pastern and fetlock, cannon and shank,
To rise at the withers, grabbing the poll,
Pop-eyed with joy at the wild surmise
That God himself had gouged the mane
And cast the spell upon the eyes . . .

And made the First Great Horse again,
More real than real, while Priam's plain
Over the common Midway lies;
And then to come home, to come home, to come home
With Father to Periwig, Silly, and Shawn
In an open-air trolley by clatter and tack . . .

The air brakes pant and the starry track
Set by Olympian gandy dancers
Rocks us asleep from a fabulous folly—
But Silly and Periwig mew and are gone,
Woodbine pens the somnolent prancers,
Long is the sleep of Father and Shawn . . .

And I wake to a world come 'round again:
A riding ring of wooden horses,
Their flung heads burred as deep as pain . . .

The Shadow of a Lie

SEAN McMARTIN

THE ROOM WAS SMALL and cramped, dust colored even on the brightest day, but he was unaware of its shortcomings although he had lived in it for almost two weeks. At the moment he was one of the white pieces dotting the far corner of the onyx and ivory inlaid teakwood chess table his father had given him for his eleventh birthday. There was a thin, heroic line—a bishop, a rook, a knight and two pawns—between him and the superior forces threatening mate. *Cul-de-sac.* What were the odds? A hundred, two hundred to one?

The ring of the phone was a needle striking a nerve. He froze then jumped away from the table and snatched it up.

A man's voice, deep and distant, said, "I am a disabled veteran, trying to scrape out a living making baskets . . ."

"No," he said sharply and hung up.

The Cranfield School Board had told him there might be an opening. They would call him one way or another before the weekend. He returned to the chess board but his interest in the problem had faded. What was he worrying about? Friday wasn't over yet. He was certainly qualified. *Those who can't do, teach.*

He leaned back, smiled and closed his eyes, conscious of the fact but not disturbed by it that the habit had become almost a ritual of late. They came to him as though they had been waiting patiently just outside his eyelids for the call, assuming their characteristic postures and mannerisms. His father, seated like a Chief Justice in his leather chair, spoke *ex cathedra*, every opinion a fact, not to be disputed on pain of obloquy . . .

You've got an I.Q. of one sixty seven. Christ, you're one of the elite, Paul. Never forget that intellect is what separates us from the animals. Not sentiment, not guts or drive, not patriotism, not loyalty, not belief in a God that doesn't exist, but brains. Life's a chess game. Learn the moves, be logical and whatever crap is thrown at you, you'll come through with flying colors.

His mother, in the darkness of his bedroom, soft voiced, subliminal, a handmaiden of sleep . . .

Paulie, my bright little man, there's such a thing as honor, too, you know. Oh, what is that marvelous line? Ah, yes. I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honor more.

They had died nearly two years ago in an automobile accident while he was in Nam and he hadn't gotten back in time for their funerals. He recalled their ghosts for family reunions, to listen again and again to the antiphon of fustion and murmur, to seek out some seed pearl of wisdom, some clue to survival that he might have missed the first time around. The past, whatever it contained, was more secure than the future and more malleable than the present.

The ring of the phone brought him back to real time. The same sepulchral voice. "I am a disabled veteran, trying to scrape out . . ."

"I just told you, no."

It rang for the third time ten minutes later. He knew it would be the same voice. As though the caller's will were stronger than his own, Paul picked up the phone.

"I am a disabled veteran, trying to scrape out a living making baskets . . ."

Paul did not even breathe. The voice hesitated for a fraction of a second.

" . . . Three colors, red, white and blue. All shapes. Use them for glove holders, for playing jai alai, or for storing needles and thread . . . "

"You're a disabled vet," Paul said, trying to sound reasonable. "You must be getting a pension."

He got a dial tone in response. He fumbled awkwardly for a cigarette, lit it with a shaking hand and let the smoke trickle through his nose. *Gloves, jai alai, needles and thread.* That first call had not been a random shot. It and the ones that followed were being directed at him personally. Why?

Paul Tremayne was twenty four years old, tall, thin, stiffly erect. There were pinpoints of grey in his dark hair and deep lines along his mouth and between his brown eyes. His bony, sensitive face was simultaneously, almost homogeneously, a boy's and a middle-aged man's.

He tried to figure out what connection there might be between the calls and something from the past. Viet Nam? The only enemy there had been Charley. The veterans hospitals? No incidents there that he could remember. Dartmouth? Cranfield High School. He opened his mouth wide in wonder. Gutman?

All through school he had led his class with straight A's. Then in his senior year for his final math mark Gutman had given him an A minus. His father, when he saw the mark, had driven them both to the school and routed Gutman from the teachers' rest room. Surrounded by smirking students they had made a tableau in the hall. Mike Tremayne, big, broad, hair like Medusa's, menacing; Arnold Gutman, skinny, balding, menaced; Paul Tremayne, small for his age, face like a girl's, catalyst.

How the hell could my Paul have gotten an A minus? In math, for Christ's Sake? Gutman, you sheeny bastard, what're you trying to do, make sure one of your own kind makes valedictorian?

Gutman had looked at Paul, pity in his watery eyes. Paul had tried to say something but the vibrations from his father's anger had clotted the words. Gutman had refused to change the mark. Paul had made valedictorian anyway by a single point.

He couldn't recall the timbre of the teacher's voice. He called the high school and asked for him. The girl who answered didn't know any Mr. Gutman. Another, older voice came on. Mister Gutman had retired last year, she believed he was living in Florida, could she be of any assistance? Paul hung up.

He had been released from service two weeks ago and had come back to Cranfield where tomorrow was programmed to be as bland as yesterday and the favorite subjects were as always the resistance to the construction of an Industrial Park and dissatisfaction with the costly fripperies in the school budget. He had not taken a stand on either one. He thought about last night. Could that be it?

Mayor Robert Sandhusen had come over with Harry Kirsch, Commander of the John Foran Post of the Cranfield American Legion. Sandhusen, a beefy man with grey-streaked, butterscotch hair, had mentioned straight off that he had been a bomber pilot, a major, in the Army Air Corps in World War II. He measured Paul with cold, out-of-the-wild-blue-yonder eyes. Kirsch—Sandhusen had introduced him as an Ordnance Sergeant in the same, half-remembered war—had the face of a boxer, lumpy and coarse featured with small, twinkling eyes.

Paul looked at them dead pan. He was no more than moderately stoned. He could read the message quite clearly in their faces.

"Lieutenant Tremayne," Kirsch said, "the Veterans Day parade is only a couple of months off and . . ." He shrugged in embarrassment . . . "well . . . we'd like you to be Grand Marshall."

"And as a special added attraction I should wear my nice, new shiny Purple Heart, right?" Paul said dryly.

Kirsch opened his mouth, shut it again and nodded. Paul laughed.

"He's got half a bag on," Sandhusen said as though it explained the inexplicable. "Haven't you, Lieutenant?"

They were hell bent on making a hero out of him, a patriot, a my-country-right-or-wrong fool. What marvelous farce. He had been drafted to begin with. He had become nothing more gung ho than an Assistant Adjutant General in a brigade headquarters far enough from the lines that the rattle of the fire fights was about as frightening as Fourth of July night in Nohami Park. They had told him in a Saigon Hospital that a grenade had been tossed into the headquarters shack by an infiltrating Cong masquerading as a Buddhist monk. He was lucky, they had added, two other men had been killed.

Paul took a deep breath. "Only a quarter of a bag but I'm building on it. It's *Mister Tremayne*, by the way, and the answer to your honorarium is no, thank you."

Two pairs of eyes swivelled toward each other, then skittered back to him.

"Why, f' God Sakes?" Sandhusen said, shock and disbelief distorting his mouth like silly putty.

"Because," Paul said, enjoying the man's discomfort. "I don't care to be a patriotic symbol—like a bald eagle."

Sandhusen's eyes bugged out as though he were the pilot of the B-17 whose bombardier had decided right over the bomb run that he was a pacifist.

"There's a certain, what do you call it, a *camaraderie*, between those who been through it," Kirsch said softly. "Sometimes it helps."

"Who needs it?" Paul snapped.

"Some of us do," Kirsch said with a little shrug.

Sandhusen made one last pathetic effort. "We figure it's everybody's responsibility to do what he can to help morale."

"You want to help my morale?" Paul said with a sliver of smile. "Dig up my right arm."

Their voices as he recalled them didn't match up with the one on the phone. It rang again. Paul counted ten, neatly spaced mocking buzzes before it stopped. He limped to the cabinet over the sink and poured himself a stiff shot of Scotch from a bottle that was two thirds empty. It slid down his throat like ice water and hit his stomach like camphor. He poured another, threw it down and put the top back on the bottle. *The white king stood in his cul-de-sac getting stoned.* On an impulse he

looked up Harry Kirsch's phone number and called him. A woman's voice told him that Kirsch was at the American Legion Hall on Liberty Avenue. He would be back home around eleven. Paul's hand began to shake again. It was late. The School Board would not call anymore. He took another drink and left the apartment.

He walked slowly through the winding, gas-lighted, brick-paved streets of the posh Riverdale section, past the Central Railroad underpass, into an area where crab grass replaced manicured turf and clumps of privet hedge were more prevalent than fieldstone fences. The Legion Hall was a one-story white stucco affair with a blue-shingled roof and a red door. The only things to distinguish it from the neat, lower middle-class homes on both sides of Liberty Avenue were the gleaming brass cannon on one side of the flagstone walk and the steel flagpole on the other.

Except for a small foyer and an office to the right of it, the place was one large rectangle, a combination dance floor, meeting hall and game room. The decor was varnished knotty pine. A small bar shared a wall with a raised platform, a pile of metal folding chairs and a juke box that was playing a Perry Como recording of *As Time Goes By*. A billiard table and a ping pong table filled the far end.

Several men, among them Kirsch, stood at the bar. At a card table a half dozen feet from it, four others played cards with economical movements of hands and lips. Kirsch beckoned to Paul with a partially filled Old Fashioned glass. He shoved out his right hand and grinned.

"Good to see you, Paul."

Kirsch introduced him to the men at the bar. Paul didn't catch their names. Kirsch held up his glass.

"Drink?"

Paul shook his head. "I'd like to talk to you."

"Sure," Kirsch said. "Fire at will."

He made no move to leave the bar. Paul frowned. He spoke in a low voice. "Anybody here you know of, maybe a disabled vet, augment his pension weaving baskets?"

"*Weaving baskets?*" Kirsch broke into a loud laugh that commanded everybody to look up, over or around. The expression on Paul's face cut the laugh short. Kirsch lowered his voice.

"Some of us draw disability, Paul, sure." He nodded toward the far side of the card table at a heavy-set man with a crop of black, oily hair and the kind of a face to be found under a hard hat. "Like Sam Frelan there. A wild round hit his spine

on the Infiltration Course at Camp Shelby, Mississippi in forty two. Lost the use of both legs. He has a hundred percent disab. He's also got his own oil business. Sam sure doesn't need to weave baskets. The guy to his left . . ." A man with a slightly lopsided face and the suggestions of deadness around the mouth . . . "is Bernie O'Neill. Bernie got cracked up so bad in a plane crash in Korea they figured he'd wear a sack over his head for the rest of his life. Bernie's a helluva good accountant. He also plays the heroine in the comedy skits we put on at the Veterans Hospitals. See what I mean, Paul? We got one-legged guys, guys who were gassed in World War I, even a blind guy, but nobody has to weave baskets."

Kirsch gave him a searching look as though Paul might be impugning something, the knotty pine decor, the camaraderie or the Cult itself.

"Why'd you ask?"

"Just curious," Paul said.

"When'd you get it?" Kirsch asked, gesturing with his head.

"August, last year."

"They give you rehab?"

Paul nodded. "Sure. I learned how to scratch my ass left handed."

There was a hurt look in Kirsch's eyes. Paul turned to go, hesitated, then looked back.

"Either you or Sandhusen mention to anybody here my turning down your parade?"

Kirsch's sequin eyes seemed to be counting Paul's eyelashes. He shook his head from side to side. Paul knew he was lying. God, what was the fascination in covering the truth as though it were somebody's private parts? In his junior year in high school he had written a paper on the themes in the short stories of J. D. Salinger. It had had to be typed and since he was neither a fast nor an accurate typist his mother had typed it for him.

"You made a grammatical mistake—a really atrocious dangling modifier—and you had two misspellings. Minuscule has two U's and concomitant has one M." She handed him the sheets. "I corrected them for you."

He threw the papers to the floor in anger.

"That's dishonorable," he shouted. "That makes it your paper, not mine."

She looked at him for a moment, sat down without another word and changed the paper to include his original mistakes.

"My young King Arthur," she said softly, touching his cheek with the tips of her fingers. "He would brook not even

the shadow of a lie."

Paul could feel a roomful of eyes on his back as he walked out of the hall. When he reached his room the phone was ringing.

"I am a disabled veteran, trying to scrape out a living weaving baskets . . ."

Weaving this time instead of *making*. He and Kirsch had phrased it that way at the Hall. He hung up, turned it over in his mind, flipped through the phone book, called the Legion Hall and asked for Kirsch.

"Paul Tremayne. Is Sam Frelan there?"

"Frelan?" Kirsch's voice drifted away. "Anybody seen Frelan? When?" Kirsch spoke back into the phone. "He left about fifteen minutes ago, Paul."

Paul hung up and went through the Yellow Pages.

"TRY OUR BUDGET PLAN

Frelan Oil — Oil Burners

Sales — Service — Installation

4 Chestnut Street, Cranfield."

Paul dialed the first of two numbers in the box. When there was no answer he dialed the second. A man's voice answered.

"Mister Frelan?"

"This's Frelan."

"Paul Tremayne. I don't want to be your target anymore." Silence . . .

"That a fact?"

"Can we meet somewhere? I think we should talk."

It was a moment before Frelan answered. There was a new note in his voice, like the growl of a savage dog.

"I'll be at one four nine Kinoma Avenue. Know where it is?"

"I'll find it."

It took Paul twenty minutes to walk to the section of Cranfield know as "The Scar." The sun was already a cherry-red slice on the rim of the sky. 149 was a dilapidated, brown-shingled shack, leaning like a happy drunk in the crook of the elbow made by a spur off the Central Railroad's main line. Lumps of coal were scattered among the stone chips surrounding the shack. A faded sign hanging from one hinge read, "Frelan Coal." A Cadillac Fleetwood was parked alongside. Frelan had obviously gone up in the world.

The windows were too grimy to encourage peeping. Paul walked into the single, empty room. The door banged shut behind him. Frelan, seated in an aluminum and canvas folding wheel chair, his feet resting on tilted platforms, grinned up at him. He snapped down the little button on the lock and slammed

home another bolt a few inches above it.

"It'd take a guy with two hands a while to undo those locks," he said. "They're rusty. You, hero, I dunno."

Hero. So his reasoning about the purpose of all the harassment had been correct. Frelan sat there like a chunk of grey-brown granite with two apertures near the top into which a delicate-fingered lapidary had inserted a pair of fire opals. He wore a short-sleeved, white knit shirt and his shoulders looked about as wide as an average doorway. The muscles in his arms, developed over the years in compensation for the dead legs, were bunched even in the rest position.

"Can we discuss this rationally?" Paul said in a voice that trembled despite his effort to control it.

In answer Frelan spun the wheels of his chair with only a slight movement of huge fingers. One moment Paul had been standing, the next he was over on his side, his shins and left elbow throbbing with pain. Frelan rolled to the other side of the shack. Paul scrambled to his feet, took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Above all things he had to be calm, to use his mind, not to allow a single lapse into emotion to precipitate more violence.

"You did agree to talk, Mister Frelan," he said quietly.

"You want to talk about your Purple Heart, hero? Okay, talk."

"It's just that I don't understand all this. We don't know each other. We've never even met."

"Oh, we met all right," Frelan snarled. "I seen your kind in every post, camp and station I was ever in. Eager beavers, brown-noses, shit-eaters. You know something, hero? I made expert with the M-1, the '03 and the heavy machine gun. *Expert*. I was a section sergeant in a heavy weapons company when I was twenty. Two squads under me. I'da been something in combat and I'da been proud of my country, ready to give up my life if I hadda. Not like you, you fuckin' fag."

The man's face was turning purple with anger. Paul realized he had no hope of appealing to that minimal intelligence. He made a sudden dash for the door. The wheel caught him a glancing blow at the second stride and sent him against the wooden wall. Frelan sat with his back toward him. When Paul straightened up the chair shot, still backwards, against his knees. He felt himself being crushed. The chair eased off and Frelan was back across the room. In the lavender mist that settled between them Frelan sat smiling, eyes half hooded in lazy contemplation of his success.

Life's a chess game. Learn the moves, learn the moves . . .

This time when Frelan came Paul was ready. He spun left and hit Frelan a backhand shot across the nose with his left fist. Blood ran in jerky veins down Frelan's mouth and off his chin. Frelan let go with a string of curses that had the rhythm and patois of another war. *Capture en passant*. Paul suddenly felt as light as air. He took off his jacket, unclipped his tie from his collar and dropped them both to the floor. He undid his shirt buttons. He had trouble getting the sleeve over the fake arm and tore it. He ripped the rest away and flung it from him. Frelan watched him curiously.

"Know what George Washington said about Benedict Arnold?" Paul said shrilly. "No, of course you wouldn't. He said, 'When we capture him, we shall hang him for treason, but we shall bury with honors the leg wounded at Saratoga.'" He unstrapped the arm. "This bother you?" He tossed it to the seated man. "Bury it."

Frelan tossed it aside. He moved suddenly. Paul leaped past him and hit him across the ear with the side of his fist. Frelan twisted the chair and came at him again. This time when Paul swung the chair stopped short. Paul's fist fanned the air. Frelan moved in quickly and dropped him. His hands moved like two playful squid. Paul felt himself being lifted as though he were nothing but clothing. He brought his elbow down into Frelan's wounded nose. The grip loosened. Paul pulled away. Frelan snorted and spat blood. Paul did a crazy little dance.

"The world was created by a two-armed, two-legged God, Frelan. Ever hear the sound of one hand clapping? Ever beat time for dead feet waltzing?

Frelan crowded him toward the far corner. Paul circled lazily on the balls of his feet. The chair lunged forward. Paul spun to one side, reached down, grabbed one of the wheels and with a heave that nearly tore his insides out, flung Frelan from the chair. *The white king moved triumphantly from the cul-de-sac, colors flying . . .*

Frelan lay on his back like a beached tuna. Suddenly he threw his hands over his face and started to sob. Paul stared at him. He could not simply walk out. It had been an honorable fight, cretin against cretin, no quarter asked or given. He limped over to the sobbing man.

"Frelan, listen. Please don't do that. You put up one helluva fight . . ."

Two arms reached up and grabbed him. The shack exploded into a shower of brightly colored signal flares. Laughter howled through a bullhorn into his ear. He saw fading in front of him a Buddhist monk with the face of Satan. He was coaxed deeper

and deeper toward the bottom of something. When he came to he was propped in a corner of the shack, the fake arm in his lap. The room was empty. Only him, white king in a *cul-de-sac*. He leaned back and closed his eyes.

"All lies," he said. "All *lies*."

They came with scarcely a sound, his father scowling but saying nothing, his mother murmuring and touching his face with the tips of her fingers. They each took one of his arms and led him gently away.

Midnight Mass

JOAN STONE

Prayers, intricate as edging, lace the air;
we bring what we have to the altar.

My head rings with a simple praise
that lifts like a spire out of darkness:

My song is Deborah's; it rings from the hill
country of Ephriam.

I have known Abraham and have laughed
at the promise of angels.

I have wept in the first light of grief:
my son is Cain.

I wear the ages like sack cloth: I lay
this thin history at your feet.

Marginalia . . .

(continued)

Better it should have gone to Dreiser, he must have thought many times during the remaining years of his life. I was reading Mark Schorer's biography and you know what he calls that part of the book that begins with Lewis getting the Nobel? "Decline." Can you imagine such irony. He says Lewis told Lillian Gish, "This is the end of me. This is fatal. I cannot live up to it."

Time seems to have proved him a prophet. I have to be honest. Students today don't know Sinclair Lewis from Upton Sinclair. Immortality he didn't get. The stuff he wrote after 1930—what a dreary list: Ann Vickers, Work of Art, It Can't Happen Here, The Prodigal Parents . . . books you wouldn't give room on your shelf.

Eugene O'Neill wasn't so lucky either. He won in 1936, two years after his health began to go. They say he shook so bad he could hardly hold a pencil. It took him the next 17 years to get four plays written, this from a man who had written nine plays between 1924 and 1931, everyone of them with something original in it.

Then there was Pearl Buck in 1938. You remember Pearl Buck? Not too many do these days. Even Nobel Prize committees can lose their sense of proportion. Not in your case, I assure you. When the Nobel committee finally got around to Faulkner (1949) and Hemingway (1954), they weren't exactly the first to know that these two were major writers of the twentieth century. Before the Nobel Prize, nobody knew where Faulkner lived, and nobody had been able to persuade him to talk about his work. After the prize, nobody could shut him up. He was giving interviews at Virginia, at West Point, and even in Japan. It's true he did manage to finish the Snopes trilogy he had started with *The Hamlet* in 1940. But certainly it's true that he became much more of the public figure and much less of a writer. He stopped writing his books and started explaining the ones he had already written. Fatal. God forbid it should happen to you. You remember what Hemingway said about how we made our writers into something strange.

Look what the Nobel did to poor old Papa. When they honored him in 1954, he had reason to be scared. After reading Faulkner's *A Fable* with disappointment, he said "no son of a bitch that ever won the Nobel Prize ever wrote a thing worth reading afterwards." No sooner had he reached that conclusion than they gave it to him. It's a wonder it took him seven more

years to kill himself. He was dead as a writer; the prize was a funeral wreath.

John Steinbeck got the black spot in 1962. Only twenty three years late. He finished his best work in the Thirties, but it took the Nobel people a while to get around to it. Another funeral procession. This time they practically had to exhume the body to honor it.

You see the point I'm trying to make, my friend, my alter ego, my creator. You are in a crucial moment. The odds against you are great. You must not let them seduce you with immortality, even if it is the only prize you haven't yet won.

But I have to be honest with you, my friend. Some things I see about you I do not like. The signs are bad. You are in Humboldt's Gift starting to write about writers. It isn't a good sign. And now you're writing non-fiction. The book about Israel—a beautiful book, I assure you, but not a novel. Is this a signal—I ask you to forgive me for even bringing this up—but could it be a signal of a failing imagination?

But I know you're aware of all this. I read where you said something very wise.

If I last long enough, I assume this will happen to me too. And then there are two possibilities. Either you've run out of imagination, in which case you're ready to be puffed up, held down like a barrage balloon by the cables before you float off into eternity. Or your imagination keeps cooking, in which case you're lucky. You're among the blessed. No man ever knows which way he's gonna go. He can only hope.

So I'm hoping, dear old friend, I'm hoping against hope that you are one of the lucky, that you may take your place among the blessed. Stay well.

*Moses Herzog
per J.J.K.*

ANN JONES is making her third appearance in *Four Quarters*. She has recently completed her first novel, *The Universe Next Door*, and has a collection of her stories already in print (University of Missouri Press). RUTH MOOSE has published poetry and fiction in many little magazines. She lives with her artist husband in a house they designed and built on Stony Mountain in the Uwharries; they share the 800 acres with two other houses. ALBERT GOLDBARTH's last volume, *JAN. 31* (Doubleday) was nominated for a National Book Award; a new collection, *Comings Back*, has just appeared on Doubleday's fall list. JANE GWYNN KEANE's story, "Coudin Iris's Illness," was published here in the summer of 1975. She lives in Athens, Georgia. SAMUEL GREEN is the editor of *Jawbone*, a small poetry quarterly published in Washington. His poems have appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *Poet and Critic*, and elsewhere. SEAN McMARTIN's stories have been among those listed on Martha Foley's Roll of Honor in *Best American Short Stories* of 1969 and 1972. His work has been seen in *Quartet*, *Carolina Quarterly*, and in numerous other periodicals. Poetry by JOAN STONE was anthologized in the *Borestone Mountain Awards: Best Poems of 1973*; her work has also been in the *Yale Review*, the *Georgia Review*, the *New York Quarterly*, and about seventy other magazines. ELEANOR SHIEL ZITO lives in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania. This is her first appearance in *4 Q's*. DAVID B. HUNTER lives in California. CLAUDE KOCH, a regular and valued contributor for the past 25 years, is Professor of English at La Salle and directs the writing program; "Carousel" honors his first grandchild.

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